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PII Redacted

MY DREAM? by Louis Weintraub

As told to Technical Sgt. A. W. Schenk

This is the story of my experience. Although the account set forth here is all true, I sometimes wonder if all this could have really happened to me or did I dream about all this. Then I awake and find that all this is true, as I carry the scars of it, not only on my mind but on my body as well. Well, now to the story:

The war began, and with the start of the war started all of the horrors that Nazi Germany proclaimed as Culture. After six days of war, the Germans came to our town of Lodz, Poland. Soon after their arrival, the order was issued that all people of Jewish faith must wear a patch on their left breast and on their backs. The patch was a Star of David on a yellow field, signifying the wearer's faith. Also, a curfew was put into effect from the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The worst thing about the order was the fact that with the patch they could pick out all the Jews, and we already knew that they were intent on exterminating all the Jews. We would not dare to come out on the

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street for fear that they would pick us up on a trumped-up charge and if that happened, we knew that no one would ever see us again. After a few weeks, another order was issued to the effect that all Jews were to move to a designated area, which was encircled with barbed wire. This was to become the Ghetto. A penalty was enforced for those that would try to either escape from the Ghetto or those that failed to move into the area. The penalty was death.

In this Ghetto was a building that was occupied by the German Police. They were called "Kripo", which stood for Criminal Police, the German letter "k" being used as we use the letter "c". Day and night we could hear cries and moans issuing from this house, and the sounds were enough to freeze the blood in your veins. People were brought there and tortured days on end for information and mainly for their fortunes. Many of the people that were taken there were of rather substantial means, and that was what the local German Police were after. Many that were taken to this place were tortured using methods that were adopted from the Spanish Inquisition. There were some that had no fortunes or wealth, and by the simple medium of forcing splinters under their finger nails and then setting them afire, these people were forced to tell who in the Ghetto was rich or well to do. The outcome of all this was that most of the people died under the tortures, and in some cases they were silenced so that there would be no living

witnesses as to what happened. This started a wave of informers. There were people that would come to the Police and inform them of certain persons who had hidden any jewels or wealth of any kind, and for this informer service they would receive extra rations and some favors.

Now I will try to give you a picture of the overall existence in the Ghetto. We received, for our daily food, a half pound of bread and a watery soup made of turnips. This occurred after the day's work was done and the workday was twelve hours. Those that were assigned to the really heavy work were given a double portion of soup. The amount of the soup was roughly a bit more than a quart. As far as quarters were concerned, we thought that we were packed as closely as possible, but we were to find out later that the quarters in the Ghetto were more than comfortable as compared to what we would have later on. We were living about 12 to 15 persons in one fair-sized room about 15 by 18 feet. Clothing and soap were not to be had at any time. We were hard put to try to keep ourselves in some state of cleanliness. Naturally, with conditions like that, it wasn't long before we were suffering from lice and other vermin. The result of this was that we soon had several cases of Spotted Typhus and some other disease that I can't name from lack of medical knowledge. Those that didn't die from hunger died of the diseases

that were mounting the daily scores of victims. If you think that death was the end for those people, you are wrong. Many that died lay where they fell, and there was no one to bury them as everyone was occupied with some sort of work assignment. After a day or so, when the odor of decaying bodies was strong enough, some of the people nearby would try to bury the bodies wherever they could find a place large enough to put a body into. In that way, we tried to stave off any additional disease that might develop. But this, too, was not enough for the conquerers. It came to pass that the Ghetto was extremely overcrowded, and the Germans started to carry on a witches hunt to eliminate some of the populace so as to have a bit more room within the Ghetto.

Now I will return to my story. My family consisted of five persons. My mother, 42 years old; myself, Louis, 18 years old; two brothers, Jacob, 16, and Isaac, 11; and one sister, Ruth, who was 13 years old. My father had died a year before the war started. One night, I don't recall the exact date, the Germans came into the Ghetto and singled out our street for some sort of shipment. What was to happen we didn't know, but they took us all, in many cases complete families, to the railroad station, where they loaded us into freight cars. After two days of traveling, we came to Birkenau in Upper Sileasia. After we unloaded from the cars, we knew the worst. The families were to be separated for what horrors God alone only knew. Immediately,

we heard cries and moans, but we also knew that nothing would help. In the distance, we saw that men were put in a separate section and women in a separate section, which were later formed into two lines. We soon found out what was to be the fate of the larger number of us. The greater number of the assembled people was to be sent to the crematorium. When my mother and the other children heard that, they started to cry with body-wracking sobs. Then they came to our part of the line. Before we were separated, my mother gave me her last order. I was under no circumstances to leave my brother. She gave me the responsibility of watching over him and to protect him in so far as was possible. She took the youngest boy and my sister with her and went to her place, which was designated by an SS man. In the distance, we saw that mother and my youngest brother, Isaac, were placed to the left, and we knew that it meant their death.

My sister was put in the group to the right. That meant that it was to be a lingering death in the work parties. I will try to describe the types of work at a later point to show what I meant by a lingering death. My brother and I were to be put to work also. The people that were being lead to their death were brought into a large shack, where they were told to undress completely and were given a towel and soap as though they were to take a shower. Naturally, everything that they had on their person in the line of valuables was taken away from them. About

1,000 to 2,000 people were let into the room that was fixed up to look like a shower room with overhead shower heads. On both sides of the walls were three small windows set in the wall about the height of a man's head. After the people were let in the room, the doors were closed and fastened down. Then the small windows were opened, and the lethal gas was let in. The people in the room were wracked from five to seven minutes until they died. After they were all dead or presumed so, they were loaded on small wagons and wheeled over to the crematorium.

In Birkenau, where there were three crematoriums, 20,000 people were cremated daily. There were days when they gassed 25 or 30 thousand people, and there were piles of human bodies left not yet cremated. At these times, we had to dig a huge pit of 150 meters long and 6 meters deep, where one layer of bodies was laid out and then a layer of wood was laid out over them in the pit. This was then soaked with gasoline and set afire. At night, the flames could be seen 8 kilometers away. I shall never forget, as long as I live, the sight of those flames that were, to my eyes, tinged with blood. The flames seemed so red, and the odor of burning human flesh was enough to sicken the strongest of men. The Element of Germany, that was to spread culture in the world, outdid themselves here with their type of culture. Some of these pits that were used to burn the bodies were so constructed with metal gutters and a drainage system and the bodies were so

arranged that the thin ones were at the bottom of the heap and the fatter ones, when there were fat ones, placed at the top, and thus the human fat was rendered, drained off via the gutters to a cistern. This fat was later sent to a factory in Danzig, Poland, and processed into a soap. This fact was uncovered by an investigation carried out by the Russians. Many children of five years and younger were treated in another manner. Many of them were lead to these pits and, in the sight of their mothers and the others, were thrown into the fires to be burned alive. An interesting point here is that to do all of this work, many of the prisoners were forced not only to build the pits, but to carry out the ghoulish incidents described previously. One work detail was known as "The Special Kommando", the word Kommando meaning work detail or group. They had to do most of this type of work and so were given better food and treatment than any of the others. In many cases, they were treated better than when they were in the Ghetto before the war. Many came into this work group of their own free will, but many more had to be forced into it. The people in this work group were of all nationalities. Some people thought that they would be able to save themselves by doing this work, but they later found that they were mistaken. The Germans would never allow any one of them to live long because they might tell of the horrors that went on here. These groups would last only a few weeks or, at most, two months and then be treated to the same sort

of death. After getting rid of the old work group, the Germans would pick a new Kommando, and all went on as before. There were, in this camp, several hospitals. They were not places to heal the sick; rather, they were used for another purpose. The doctors from the SS would come into the block houses and pick out the healthy specimens and take them to the hospital for experimentation with all types of diseases such as Typhus, Malaria and so forth in the hope of developing new methods and types of serums, innoculations and cures. Naturally, most of these specimens died, but those that lived were given the best of care and nursed back to health, after which time the doctors tapped them for their blood to be used in the preparation of serum for antidotes for the various diseases. These serums were used mainly for the SS troops. Now back to my story....

The group that I had been selected for was marched off to a bath house, where we turned over all of our clothing and valuables. After that, we were given prisoner-type haircuts and then given showers. After the shower, we put on the striped clothing that we were to wear the rest of the time until our liberation. We were then taken to Block 4, which was formerly a gypsy camp, but the gypsies had already suffered the fate shared by some thousands of others. Having gotten rid of the former occupants, they now had place to house us. There, the old story started again. I mean, the guards beat the prisoners and tortured

them in an attempt to get valuables, money or information of those that had such items. Some of the prisoners had fixed into their teeth small, but precious, diamonds that they figured on using to either buy their escape from camp or, at least, make their lot easier. When the guards found out about that, they went about knocking out teeth that looked as though they might conceal a stone or the like. In the meantime, they took what gold teeth and dentures they could find. They started to impose penalties and make us perform in such manner so as to wear us down and break our spirit. They would have us run from one side of the building to the other until we could run no more, and then they would beat us with the lead-tipped sticks they carried for failing to obey an order. All this took place during the night in a small block house that housed 800 men. Early in the morning, we were awakened at 5:00 a.m. rain or shine, and then they would start the same grind of trying to wear us down. At 10:00 a.m. we received the watery soup that was our meal for the morning. If you managed to get your soup and walk away with it, you could consider yourself very lucky because they would strike at your hands with their sticks and you would lose the whole thing. Sometimes, one of them would feel particularly mean that morning and would come to the head of the line and upset the whole kettle of soup, and then no one got anything to eat for that morning. At night, when we

returned to the block house, we received a piece of bread, about a half pound per person.

A few days passed, and some of us began to pray that they would send us away to work so as to escape the constant beatings and be occupied, and in that way perhaps time would pass that much quicker. This camp, Birkenau, was just an assembly point for the prisoners, where they could be separated and classified as to type of work assignment. If an owner or manager of a coal mine or a factory needed manpower, he would come to the camp and select the men he thought best suited for the work. Here, the selections were as though it were a marketplace for horses. They would look to your physical development, size and so forth, as a man who seeks to purchase a horse for his farm would look for points of strength and endurance.

Two weeks after my arrival in Birkenau, a man came to pick up a work detail for a coal mine, and we, my brother and I, were picked for this group. The mine was called the Janina and was located 14 kilometers from Auschwitz. We were then transferred to the camp at Auschwitz. After our arrival at the camp, we were again given a bath and new clothing and were tattooed with our prison number on our arm. My number was B-8564, and my brother's number was B-8568. Two days later, we were taken to the coal mine. I think that this place was the closest thing that I could ever find to compare with Danto's Inferno. We had to work every

day from 4:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. In all the time we worked there, we never saw the sun. My brother and I were sent to a level where we had to stand in water up to our knees. In the mine, it didn't make much difference as to the time of the year (season), but in the winter we suffered because we would come up from the mine wet and, after getting to the surface, we would have to stand for a roll call to see that everyone was present. It was then we really felt the difference as the cold would freeze the water and our legs, as well. We then had to walk two kilometers to the camp where, again, we had to stand for a roll call, which lasted about an hour and a half. After that, we went to shower and received our second meal for the day. The meal consisted of a soup made of turnips.

One day, I had an accident in the mine. My hat, which had a lamp attached to it, fell down and was covered by the coal. I looked but couldn't find it. When I got back to camp and stood for the roll call, they noticed that I didn't have my hat and lamp with me, so I was punished with 25 lashes. There was another time when I became too weak to work; I was taken to the surface and back to camp. Then, after two days, I was charged with sabotage. For this charge, I was punished with solitary confinement. I will try to describe the solitary cell. It was the height of an ordinary man (about 5 foot 9 inches) and about 3 feet wide. As a result, I was forced to stand up all the time. In the morning,

the door was opened and I was told to come out. From standing so long in one position and the freezing weather, my feet seemed to be paralyzed and so, when I tried to move, I fell over. They poured a bucket of water over me to bring me to, as they thought I was unconscious. I was then picked up and taken to a pole nearby, where I was tied and forced to stand that way for two hours. After that, I was sent to the hospital for two weeks and then returned to work. I seemed to be very fortunate as most of the time, when a man was too weak for work, his food would be stopped and he would be sent to the crematorium.

Every two weeks, a doctor would come to the camp to look over the prisoners held there. Those that didn't look healthy he would designate for extermination by pointing his finger at them and the guards would take them off to the gas chamber. Again, good fortune was with me in that while I was working in the coal mine, there were many civilian employees working there with us. They would, in so far as was possible, try to make things somewhat better for us. They would try to smuggle in food for us and, in general, try to treat us with kindness. The guards would never come down to the lower levels, so we were able to carry on a system where we could purchase from these civilians, food, for some article of clothing or for some valuable that we had managed to conceal on our person. If, at any time, you were caught stealing some clothing to sell or were caught buying food, the

penalty was death. Many of the French, Italian or Hungarian prisoners that were there tried to kill themselves when they found they could no longer stand the grind or the torment that went on. They would try to throw themselves against the electrified barbed wire fence that encircled the camp. One day, when one of the Frenchmen tried this form of suicide, the current was not at it's full strength but was just enough to hold him on the fence so that he could not let go. When the doctor took him down from the fence, they found that they would have to amputate three of his fingers due to the burns and cuts received from the barbed wire. At the hospital, he was given the very best of care until his recovery. When he was well again, he was tried for his actions and received as punishment 50 lashes and no food for three days. After that, he was sent to the heavy work detail for two weeks, and shortly after that he was exterminated.

About the 17th of January, 1945, an order was issued that the camp would have to be vacated. We later found out, the reason for that order was that the Russians were moving into nearby areas, bringing the front too near to keep the camp active any longer. I can't be sure of the exact date because we had no calendar and very little idea of time passing during the years I spent in the camps as a prisoner.

The sick that couldn't move out with the rest of the camp personnel were dealt with as follows. Some were shot to death,

some were hung and some were beaten to death. The Germans were very ingenious in their method of dealing out death to the prisoners. We left the camp without any preparations in the matter of food or clothing for the trip. We received no food during the whole trip until we arrived at Auschwitz. At this point, they were undecided as to what to do with the food stuffs that they were carrying. They couldn't decide whether to leave it behind for the Russians, who were constantly moving up closer or should they give it to the prisoners. The final decision was to give it to the prisoners, and for the first time in a very, very long time, we knew what it meant to be full having had enough to eat. After eating, we moved out and traveled for three days and three nights until we arrived at Gleiwitz. On the way, we saw bodies of prisoners from the forward part of the column that had fallen by the wayside. The cause of death was either too sick to travel and so were shot by the guards or froze to death while being supported by their fellow prisoners. In Gleiwitz, we stayed at a camp that was already evacuated. There we stayed, hungry, cold, sick, and there was very little space for all of us to lay down to get some sleep. Many of us were so weak and exhausted that we could no longer support ourselves and we fell in a heap, one person on top of another, and in that way we managed to get a little sleep. In the morning, we found that there were some that had died during the night, but no one was strong enough to even

remove the bodies during the night. Early that morning, we were taken to the railroad station and packed into open coal cars for the next part of our trip. We were 120 men to a car. There wasn't enough room for all of us to sit or lay down, and so we started our trip standing up. During the first night of the trip, some of the men in the car went insane and started to shout and cry hysterically. They began to crawl over those in the car that were trying to sit or half recline. After a few moments, one of them produced a knife that he had concealed on his person and began to attack all the prisoners within reach. After a period that seemed like two hours, they became so weak from the struggle that some of them died and the bodies were thrown from the cars. That was the first night, and every night after we were accustomed to seeing eight to ten bodies being thrown from the cars. The trip lasted twelve days and twelve nights. The only time we received any food was on the third day and on the seventh day; they tossed in three to five loaves of bread. When we saw the bread, many of us became wild as we fell over the bread and fought madly in the car. Some were killed in that mad scramble. We didn't get any water to drink at any time, but some of the men had some small pans and other small utensils, which we used, tied by a few shoe laces and thrown over the side of the car. In that way, we managed to scoop up snow from the ground, which we used to quench our thirst. After a few days had gone by, we found that some of the men had

gone completely insane and were eating human flesh from those that had died during the night. We couldn't throw out the bodies during the day as the guards wouldn't allow that, so we had to wait for dark or dawn to do the ghastly work. In the darkness of the night, those that were inclined cut pieces from the dead bodies, as they were assembled, to be tossed over the side. On the fourth day, we arrived at a place called Breslau, where there was a camp called Gross Rozen. At this camp, the commandant wouldn't accept the shipment of prisoners as the camp was already overcrowded, so we had to continue to wander. We traveled throughout the whole of Germany and Czechoslovakia until we came to Austria and the concentration camp, Madhausen. There, we dropped several cars, and the remainder traveled back to Oranienburg. This was near Berlin. There, we were unloaded on to small carts and litters, and we were taken into the camp. At the conclusion of this trip, of the 120 men that were originally loaded into the car, only 65 men got off of the car just barely alive. In Oranienburg, my brother and I were together for about a week, and, at the time, both of us were suffering from sores on our feet and on our bodies. The pains were such that we didn't think we would recover from it. After a week, we were taken from there to Flossenburg, but this trip was made under much better conditions than the last one. There were only 80 men to a car and two SS men to each car. These two took up at least one

quarter of the space in the car for themselves. One of the SS men in our car was a particularly vicious character, and at every opportunity, for each minor infraction of the rules that he had set down, he would take great delight in beating the offender, and, if possible, he would try to fracture some member of his body. Some of the rules that he set down were as follows; we were not to change our places in the car at any time, or that we were not to step over the line in the car that he had drawn to separate his part of the car from ours. While on the ride to Flossenburg, we received every day 3/4 pound of bread and a small tab of margarine. When we arrived at Flossenburg and saw the camp in the distance, we lost all hopes of survival. The camp was situated in the mountains at an altitude of 1500 meters above sea level. The weather there was constantly bitter cold and damp. We had a great deal of rain and snow to add to the cold weather and our other miseries. After we unloaded from the cars, we had to march four kilometers to the camp, and in that short distance, we lost quite a few of us due to weakened conditions. Those that couldn't get up after falling were shot by the guards. No mercy was shown at any time. We later found out that an order was sent down from Himmler, the Chief of the Gestapo, "That not one prisoner was to fall into the hands of the Allied troops alive." We were taken into the quarantine blocks and, there, we received the same old treatment as before. We received food twice daily of the type of

rations mentioned before. We slept in three decker bunks, and in each bunk were three or four men. Here, we met with a new disaster. Dysentery broke out among the prisoners, and, daily, we found numbers that died from that disease. With normal medical care, this would not have happened, but there was no medical care to be wasted on us.

After being in such an environment for a long period of time, a person loses his sense of reasoning and all feeling of sympathy for his fellow man. There were some who had sunk so far that if they saw a fellow prisoner dying, they would take his portion of bread from him with only the thought that the dying man had no further use for it anyway. They would also take his shoes and clothing and anything else that might make their own lot somewhat more liveable. This was self-preservation.

Here, again, I come back to my own story. We were taken to block 10 and from this block were picked work parties for other camps. It was here that my brother came down with dysentery. One day, my brother and I were picked to go out together on a work party and, after we were counted off, they found that there was one too many and I was separated from the group and my brother. When I saw that we were to be separated, I tried to see the guard in order to get back with the party. I approached him telling him that my brother was sick and that we wanted to be together. The German guard, to show his authority, decided that I had become too

familiar and gave me 25 lashes. The outcome was that we were separated. I couldn't believe that my brother would be able to bear up with his illness and weakened condition. Prior to this, we were always together and would help one another, but now he was alone and there was no way of knowing what was in store for him. I remained in this camp for two more weeks and then was sent on a transport to Grauwinkel near Thuringen, Germany. The trip was made in pretty good condition. We had the same 3/4 pound of bread and margarine per man. Oh yes, also the two SS men to a car. On the way to Grauwinkel, we stopped at Odruff only to find that we had come to the wrong camp, and then we were sent to Grauwinkel. I forgot to mention that at Odruff we had to walk 20 kilometers to the camp. When the error of the wrong camp was discovered, we were told that we had to get back to the station quickly to catch the train. We were told that if we missed the train, we would be forced to march 70 kilometers to Grauwinkel. Naturally, there were those that were sick and weak among us, and they fell by the wayside. When we started the trip originally, we were given rations for four days, but with all that food in our hands, we ate with no thought of tomorrow. After two days, there was nothing left. When we had this additional trip of 70 kilometers, the hunger was impossible. We had no water at all at any time, so on the march back to the station, some of the men saw some slimy water in a ditch. They fell to drink that. For this they were

beaten and shot. We finally came to the railroad station, and, after a two-hour ride, arrived at Grauwinkel. When we unloaded from the cars, all we could see was forest. We marched for what seemed like hours until we came to the camp's electrified barbed-wire fence. At the tower, we were stopped and there we were counted off like cattle and sent into the camp. We looked around for the block houses that were the usual housing for prisoners, but all we could see were small mounds of earth with small doors at one end. These would be our new quarters. We were brought to a large square, where they picked out those still fit to work. Those considered unfit were sent to the crematorium.

Here, again, good fortune was smiling at me as I was chosen as fit to work and, therefore, would remain alive. There would be times when I would wonder whether I really was lucky to remain alive as it only meant that my tortures would continue, but the will to live is so strong in the human being that I did consider myself lucky. We were counted off, 150 men to one of these mounds, which we called "bunkers". There were no beds at all. What we did have were shelves that lined the entire room. They formed a square all around the room except at the door. On those shelves, we were to sleep 75 men to a shelf. In the morning at about 3:00 a.m., we were awakened and given a quarter pound of bread and some cold orzatz coffee for our breakfast, and we were sent out to form the work party. We marched five kilometers from

the camp to a small narrow guage railway, where we loaded ourselves into small dump cars, and from there we rode 15 kilometers to the area, where we would work. When I saw the work I was to do, I was left speechless. I had exchanged my job in the coal mine for a job in a rock quarry. This place was the most desolate-looking spot on earth. We would have to wait for the cars in order to go back to camp. Many times the cars would not arrive on time, and we would not get back on time. Our usual return time was 7:00 p.m. When we returned to the camp, we received our portion of soup, and we went to sleep. No one even bothered to wash as we were all exhausted. Naturally, there were no hygienic measures taken, and soon we were infested with lice and the old diseases returned taking their toll in human lives. This didn't last very long as the American troops were rapidly fighting their way closer to the camp, and, again, we had to evacuate the camp.

We left Grauwinkel and were marched to Odruff, seven kilometers away. Here, we stayed only two days and, again, had to leave due to the Americans' advance. It was here that we realized that our long-awaited liberation was at hand. But here, too, we saw grim death before our eyes because the Germans were taking us deeper into Germany, at the same time trying to exterminate as many of us as possible so as to have no live witnesses to tell of the crimes they had committed under the disguise of "Kulture", of

the Hitler-Himmler type. I decided that I could bear this no longer and would try to escape. During the night, I tried to run away and was spotted by one of the SS men and was shot in the knee. I thought that my knee was smashed, but I found that it was only grazed. As soon as I fell, I immediately got to my feet again as I didn't want to be shot while lying on the ground. The SS men used a system in killing the stragglers. If they saw a body lying on the ground in the road, they would make sure that it was dead by firing a shot into it, even though it may have been shot through like a sieve. We later found one of our friends that had tried to fake death by falling by the wayside and remaining very still. He had about 40 bullet holes in his body. At the time I was shot, we were about eight kilometers from Buchenwald and, thanks to some friends that carried me most of the way, I managed to arrive at Buchenwald still alive. There, I first tried to treat my wound. I tore my shirt into strips to bind up my knee. I was very fortunate that I didn't get any blood poisoning as my shirt was lice-infested and extremely dirty. In this camp, we, again, didn't get a long rest as the Americans were approaching this camp. Again, the Germans started to evacuate the camp. The first ones to be sent from the camp were the Jews. I tried to stay behind, praying that the Americans would reach the camp before I was sent out, so I gave my status as a Polish Gentile. In this way, I managed to delay my evacuation

for three days. When my party was called to be evacuated, I hid myself in a pit latrine and, there, I stayed about three or four hours. Then we heard the booming of artillery fire and the noise of moving tanks. My friends came to take me out of my hiding place. We went from there to the block house where the prisoners were shouting like madmen, dancing and kissing each other, happy in the thought that the end of all their tortures, pain and privation was at hand. Then we heard the order over the public address system of the camp that all SS men were to flee from the camp. About an hour later, we came out and saw a band of the prisoners, armed with guns and grenades, were attacking the SS men that were still in the camp. I didn't know where they had gotten weapons or where they had learned to use them, but from what we saw, they were doing a masterful job of it. Can you picture the happiness that reigned in the camp that day. Even those that died that day from their weakened conditions died with a smile on their lips, and the last thing they would say was a blessing for the American troops for liberating them from this lingering death and also for what they were doing to the Germans; these German beasts who outdid themselves in "Man's inhumanity to man". We could also picture the end of Germany as a warring nation, a nation that, twice in a lifetime, loosed upon the world a war of horror, death in its wildest form, untold suffering to millions of people in all parts of the world. All this to satisfy a mad leader and his

dream. And let us not forget the arrogant, overbearing and militaristic attitude of the German people as a whole. Prior to the evacuation of Buchenwald, the American Air Forces were starting to bomb the area nearby. The Germans had, in this camp, some factories. And in order to save these factories from the bombing, they painted red crosses on the roofs, knowing that the Americans would respect this sign of mercy. These same planes later came back and dropped food and other things that we had not seen in years.

The first thing that the Americans did when they came into the camp was to feed the starving souls they found there. The bad thing about this was that we were not accustomed to eating like humans anymore, and the food that they gave us was rich, too rich for our shriveled stomachs to absorb. And, so, when we ate the food, it caused a new outbreak of dysentery and many of the prisoners died. In some cases they died happy, having eaten like human beings again at least once more before their death. Most of them were resigned to their death and no longer had the will to live. I, myself, fell sick a week after the Americans came with Spotted Typhus. I was sick for four weeks and came very close to death several times. I imagine that I was ordained to live and thanks to the American medical personnel, who worked wonders in the camp, many of us that should have died remained alive.

After I came out of the camp, I went to Weimar, where I found many American soldiers who helped me a great deal. There, I met two medical officers from the 91st Medical Battalion. These two were a Captain Kramer and Captain Conn, who took an interest in me and helped me find myself again. They actually returned me to the status of a fellow human and found work for me within the unit. When the Russians came to occupy their zone, the unit moved to Geissen. I moved with them as part of the unit as I was working for them as an interpreter and general handy man.

The time came for the unit to return to America, so I went to Frankfort and from there to Bad Nauheim, Germany, where I am at the time this is being written. Here, I managed to find work with the local Jewish Chaplain. (NOTE: It was here that Louis was of great help to the Area Signal Officer, Captain C. R. Ballard, and his assistance, Technical Sgt. A. W. Schenk. It was here that Louis and Sgt. Schenk became very good friends and had many memorable good times together.) The local Jewish Army Chaplain was Captain Samuel Blinder. It was while I was here that word reached me that my brother was alive and was on his way to see me. You can picture my happiness when I heard the news. After a few days, my brother came to me and his story was much the same as mine. One thing that he had was when he was at Dachau, he tried to escape and was shot in the face. This scar he will carry for the rest of his life as a memento of German Kulture. We are now

trying to find our sister. We have heard that she is alive but, as yet, we have no clue as to her whereabouts.

This is my story or, as I have previously said, perhaps my dream. Now that I am again a free man, the job of rehabilitating myself seems to be very trying as here in Germany there is very little opportunity for me. The entire European Continent is too war torn as of this time for anyone to rebuild his life, after having been through all that I have set forth here. From my contacts with the Americans, I have been led to believe that I can, again, become a man among men, and my hope for that lives in me in the chance to come to the home of freedom, America.

SEPTEMBER
1945

As an after foot note to this story, I can now finish this story and my part to it. A short time ago, I was called to the telephone at my home to speak to a friend who would not give his name to my wife. That friend was Louis Weintraub. He had finally come to the land of his hopes. When I found that he had also brought with him what remained of his family, I wasn't at all surprised as I knew Louis to be a man of many abilities. He had brought here his brother, Jacob, and sister, Ruth.

Here, perhaps he can find peace and the opportunity to start a new life as did the persecuted peoples that founded America.

A.W. Schenk
T/Sgt. 15th Army HQ.
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A. W. Schenk
T/Sgt. 1st Army Hq.
Wire Chief, Signal Office

CHAPTER 13. THE NEW IMMIGRANTS

In 1946 the Weintraubs arrived in Detroit. There were three of them--all teenagers. They were alone. Ruth, Jack and Larry had survived the Lodz ghetto, Auschwitz and several slave labor camps. Jack had been shot in the final days of the war and regained consciousness in an Allied field hospital. Ruth struggled with nightmares, haunted by memories of her mother, her cousin, songs, death, typhus and starvation. When Ruth returned to her family home in Lodz to search for her brothers--for anyone--she was invited in by non-Jewish neighbors and served tea on her own family's china.

There could be no choice about leaving, only a choice about where to go: Palestine or America. They came to Detroit because, while working for the Army in Germany, Larry had met American soldiers from Detroit who told him it was a decent place to live and find work and because in Poland, from a family of some eighty relatives, they were three of nine cousins who survived the Holocaust.

In Detroit, the Resettlement Service and the Jewish Family and Children's Service grappled with questions about procedures and appropriate actions that would serve the best interest of survivors like the Weintraubs. At first, the three found themselves separated and placed in foster homes volunteered by Jewish families like the ^{BUCHALTER} Gellers with whom the brothers lived. Ruth lived with Goldie Goldstein. Unaware of the full nature of

the Holocaust experience, social workers tended to treat such new arrivals with professional demeanors that proved insensitive in many cases. Separation may have been the worst decision for those who clung tenaciously and fearfully to the remnants of their families.

After some agitation, especially from Ruth, the agency decided to allow them to live together and found the three Weintraubs a flat, provided them regular domestic help, allowances and spending money, high school and eventually helped Jack and Larry to attend Wayne State University. As students, their experience heightened their gratitude to their adopted city and they changed their name from Weintraub to Wayne. All that mattered to them, however, was staying together. Federation, after some discussion about the advisability of allowing three immigrant, traumatized youngsters their independence, saw to it that they remained united. As a teenager, Ruth kept house for her two brothers while attending Central High School.

Before victims of the Holocaust who survived could come to the United States, they faced legal complications of immense proportions. Federal regulations demanded affidavits from sponsors in America. In Detroit, small groups of lawyers and leaders of various segments of the Jewish population began to meet in order to provide sponsorship for survivors--even those without relatives in Detroit. Led by Judge Levin, Fred Butzel and Julian Krolik, they undertook to cajole, persuade or bargain with Jews in Detroit to sign affidavits for distant relatives or

even strangers whose names appeared on survivor lists from the Joint Distribution Committee and HIAS. According to Nathan Milstein, a lawyer actively engaged in alleviating immigration red tape, a "complicated web of activities" involving governmental, JSSB and Federation cooperation surreptitiously emerged. Krolik, then president of Federation, and described by Sobeloff as "one of the most able presidents of Federation, an understanding man with a feeling for other elements of the community," led a network of individuals in placing "psychological and other pressure" on individuals from government officials in the state apparatus to Jewish citizens of Detroit. This assiduous volunteer enterprise, passionately undertaken by committed men and women like the Kroliks and Fred Butzel and professionals like Milstein and Levin, proceeded as a first step alongside the more public efforts.

As a result, survivors arrived in Detroit, usually under the auspices of a family sponsor. Many of those first arrivals, like the Weintraubs, had suffered interrupted childhoods that would never be recaptured. Simultaneously old and young, they received stipends from the Jewish Social Service Bureau, assistance from the Jewish Vocational Service, guidance from social workers, friendship through the Jewish Center and other forms of outreach from Yiddish groups like the Sholom Aleichem Institute and the Workmen's Circle. The Children's Service placed some of the younger survivors.

All this if and when they could reach out themselves,

through those lost childhoods, stark memories, parentless lives in which everything had been torn away. Troubled youngsters like Martin Adler, who arrived in Detroit as a fifteen year old with no family, having survived Auschwitz and Dora and Bergen Belsen, wrestled with the task of reaching out, silently, for a new life. Placed first in the Cleveland Jewish Children's Home, Bellefaire, with which Detroit maintained a reciprocal arrangement, Adler came to Detroit with his friend, Jack Weinberger. The Children's Service placed him with a family, the Gellers, who had also taken in Jack Weintraub upon his arrival, and shortly after that, he ^{THE WEINTRAUBS & BUCHALTER} was relocated by them to be with his friend in another Jewish household. He received a regular stipend from the JSSB, even after he obtained a job working as a stock boy for Norman Naimark. Like the Weintraubs, he began to create a new life; unlike them, he resembled the majority of survivors who had no close family left.

Newly elected president of Congregation B'nai Moshe, Samuel Friedman left his first board meeting over which he presided to meet his twenty-three year old nephew Abraham Pasternak when he arrived from New York. After being torn from his home in Betlan, Transylvania in 1944 by Hungarian fascists, Abe endured Auschwitz, the infamous death marches and several other labor camps. He came to Detroit in 1947 where he lived in a room in his uncle's home on Chicago Blvd. Those around him reacted to him, as they reacted to most survivors, with a mixture of

incomprehension, pity, condescension, fear and even contempt. People seemed to feel it necessary to explain how to turn on lights, flush toilets, use money, even speak.

Pasternak recalled conflicting feelings: longing to talk about his lost family and his experiences, to have people understand his confusion and fears; anguish over the thought of speaking and the prospect of encountering indifferent listeners; determination to proceed independently, make a new life; hoping for some kind hand reaching out to facilitate a new beginning. Employed first at Grunt's Market at \$25 a week, he was able to pay back the \$25 loan to the Hebrew Free Loan and began to pay his uncle rent when he got a job as a stock clerk in Federal's Department Store for \$45 a week. There, a co-worker struck a patronizing pose and told him that "when you laugh the world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone." A clear message. "If we had only been able to tell someone how we felt," Pasternak said years later, "we could have relieved some of our burden." He recalled that Federation sponsored Saturday night dances for the survivors at the Jewish Community Center. By 1950 he was drafted into the Army as an acting chaplain.

Jewish organizations and a few Jewish individuals who were affiliated with them took these wary and tormented people into their homes and lives. Just as with the earlier twentieth century Jewish immigration, when the immigrants stopped coming to America, they continued to come to Detroit, moving there from other cities where they had located first. By the mid-fifties,

Detroit's survivor population numbered between 3,500 and 4,000 people and others came even into the seventies in search of work or new lives. From Beregcasz or Kapusanyi, Velky Beresny, Lodz, Krakow, Betlan and towns from Czechoslovakia, Greece, Poland and Hungary they had moved to Montreal or Galveston, Toronto or Indianapolis, Topeka or Minneapolis, New York or Cleveland. Now they came to Detroit. Approximately one-third came from Hungary, Eastern Czechoslovakia and Rumania. Many of these, like Nathan and Edith Roth, arrived in Detroit from far-flung places like Dallas, Texas and small cities in Ohio because remnants of their communities had chosen Detroit for its prospective economic possibilities. They were drawn to B'nai Moshe, the Hungarian Shul, and accepted there as they reconstituted shattered lives with substitute families.

First among the institutions to give aid, the Resettlement Service, which had been founded in 1937, continued its work to find and resettle these new immigrants. In September, 1945, the Federation board discussed with the Resettlement Office the prospects for Detroit's accepting responsibility for a number of Jews who had been connected with the Oswego Project since 1944. After two years of struggle, the National Refugee Board established a camp in Oswego, New York for one thousand rescued Jews. In 1945 nine hundred of the "internees" might be "released" if private Jewish agencies would assume responsibility "for support and adjustment" of the survivors. Federation agreed to accept "not more than thirty" of these, many of whom had been

chosen by American agents for their professions. Joseph Langnas, a young German Jew who, along with his family, had been rescued in Italy, found himself as a teen-ager in the strange city of Detroit.

In 1947 the Resettlement Service claimed responsibility for forty-two families and five children. Its budget had grown from \$16,208 in 1945 to \$121,865 in 1947. By 1950, approximately 10% of the new immigrants were receiving help from the Resettlement Service. In 1949, Detroit had taken in two hundred families from displaced persons camps and Harold Silver, director of the Service, declared that "90% . . . have no problem that cannot be solved by permanent housing and a job. . . . Their health, both mental and physical, is suprisingly good. . . . They only need initial community boosts to become self-supporting, constructive residents." The 1949-50 budget for the Resettlement Service soared to \$340,000 and fell to \$316,429 in 1950-51.

Part of that agency soon included an Indemnification Service through which assistance was given to Holocaust victims to process requests for restitution for damage to "health, life and liberty under the Nazi regime." A Migration Service quickly established a center to assist in finding and bringing relatives from Europe. Beginning in 1945, that service had names of Detroit Jews searching for surviving relatives published regularly in the Jewish News. That paper continued to have photographs of children reading, playing, laughing and smiling, reunited families in such remote places as Oklahoma, Texas, New

York or Tel Aviv sprinkled throughout its pages.

The number of families sponsored by the Resettlement Service peaked in 1949 at 198. Yet, in 1953 it brought eleven more families and in 1957 the number had risen to thirty-five. Harold Silver, Executive Director of the Service wrote that "we defined our responsibility to the newcomers as material assistance at minimum levels and casework help in becoming adjusted to their new life." To achieve those goals, other agencies cooperated: the Jewish Vocational Service trained new Detroiters and found jobs for them; the Jewish Community Center offered recreational, social and educational programs like the dances Abe Pasternak recollected; the North End Clinic and then Sinai Hospital offered health services; the Hebrew Free Loan Association provided its services; and so it went.

In the winter of 1949, the JSSB and the Jewish Vocational Service recommended special English classes for practical goals. With the cooperation of the Twelfth Street branch of the Center, the Detroit Board of Education and volunteers from the National Council of Jewish Women, the classes were initiated. The teacher and supervisor, Mrs. Valerie Komives, received assistance from the Council of Jewish Women. The first three week course attracted seventy-five students and specialized in industrial English for the primarily male class. Because of its success, the Center and the JSSB recommended a second course, this one for ten weeks, that drew 120 students. Hal Schneiderman of the

Center staff coordinated the classes, a consulting committee of Mrs. William Isenberg of the the Jewish Center board and Mrs. David Pollac and Mrs. Maxwell Katzen of the Council of Jewish Women, Howard Mausner of the JVS and Sarah Lev of the JSSB assisted. By 1950 the classes in industrial English were supplemented by classes in English that would prove useful to women--teaching shopping phrases, household words and the like. When students stopped attending, Schneiderman commented, the staff knew the classes were succeeding. This educational endeavor served as a model for the cooperative work of different Jewish agencies in Detroit.

Victims who survived elicited good intentions, professional social work skills, funding and sympathy. Yet, so unprecedented a catastrophe could not easily be mediated by routine procedures whose standards emerged from earlier experiences with immigrants. Much later, some survivors would reveal that they felt intimidated or patronized; that, in some cases, some agencies did not offer them work or education that matched their own competencies. One survivor recalled that the Jewish Vocational Service offered him menial jobs working for Jewish businesses at the minimum wage of \$.75 per hour. Still others, like Pasternak, remember being explicitly told not to speak of their experiences: "don't tell me or your co-workers about the terrible things you saw. That was then, this is now." And another woman, when asked about life in the ghetto, described standing in long lines for hours to obtain stale bread or rotten vegetables. The response

from her Jewish co-worker: "we had to wait in lines, too, for stockings and things." Among the most competent directors of social services in the country, even Harold Silver seemed unaware that mental and physical health had become elusive and that these Jews would be forever marked by their experiences.

As awareness of the magnitude of the European catastrophe increased, it seemed as if the diverse elements of the Jews of Detroit drew together to give aid to the new immigrants. Yet, an odd amalgam of apprehension, guilt, uncertainty and incomprehension pervaded those who became involved with the survivors. For their part, the survivors found speaking about their trials difficult, quickly realizing how impossible any real communication about the Holocaust would be. They remained separated by that abyss, a chasm filled with confused emotions for both Detroit and European Jews who soon identified themselves as Detroiters. It would take thirty-five to forty years before they would begin to bear witness to the Holocaust--and even then only fragments of their stories filtered through the difficulties of speaking.

Their arrival provided an opportunity for rival agencies and organizations to cooperate in their attempts at resettlement. It would take years before the deeper needs of the survivors would come to light--too late, in many cases, to make a difference. Rarely did social workers offer psychological counseling or lend sympathetic and understanding ears. In general, they encouraged "new beginnings" which meant forgetting the past--or trying. Few

grasped the enormity of the event and fewer still the impediments to speaking about it. If fewer immigrants came than had come in the first part of the century, the accompanying problems bore immensely more complicated consequences. Where insensitivities on the part of social workers in the 1920's produced one sort of aftermath, insensitivities to the new immigrants left an aftermath nearly impossible to overcome later. Good intentions, the most professional skills and proficiency could not have adequately countered the consequences of the Holocaust. If those who worked for the Resettlement Service and other agencies did not know that, they shared that naivete with virtually every Jewish American. Those consequences, however, often forced those victims who survived further into themselves and an indescribable loneliness.

Nevertheless, the survivors would become an integral, contributing portion of Detroit Jewry, gravitating to all the various Jewish communities from the religious, Orthodox to the secular organizations. By the mid-1950's, many contributed regularly to the Allied Jewish Campaign, and by the 1960's many identified with the leadership of Federation, with Zionist supporters, especially regarding Israel bond drives, Council and other groups. From their ranks would emerge successful businessmen, loving parents, forceful voices in the Jewish population of Detroit. Many would overcome religious ambivalence to lead large congregations like Shaarey Zedek and B'nai Moshe and Temple Beth El, become members of the boards of Federation

and other agencies and even chairmen of the Allied Jewish Campaign. They would participate prominently in organizations like the Council, Workmen's Circle, United Hebrew Schools, and every aspect of Detroit Jewish life.

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